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Sent: Fri 3/27/2015 1:14:17 PM
Subject: VI Incident News Clips

DPNR issues 'stop work' order in St. John poisoning case

27 Mar 2015

The Virgin Islands Daily News

By ALDETH LEWIN Daily News Staff

ST. THOMAS – The V. I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources has issued two orders this week to Terminix International USVI to stop using and to quarantine any methyl bromide it may have throughout the territory.

DPNR found that Terminix has used the dangerous gas a number of times in recent months across the territory.

Methyl bromide is an odorless gas that is approved for use as a pesticide only in very restricted circumstances.

DPNR and the Environmental Protection Agency are investigating an incident that occurred on St. John last week in which a family of four was poisoned and hospitalized. Investigators suspect that the cause of the poisoning was methyl bromide, although that has not yet been confirmed by laboratory testing.

The family of four, visiting St. John from Delaware, was admitted to Schneider Hospital on Friday, two days after Terminix treated a unit adjacent to the condominium they were renting at Sirenusa Condominium Resort.

Local real estate company, Sea Glass Vacations, acts as the rental agent for several units at Sirenusa, including Villa Capri.

Villa Capri was rented by Steve Esmond, his wife, Theresa Devine, and their two teenage sons from March 14 through Sunday.

All four family members have since been flown to the states for medical treatment and are in serious but stable condition.

DPNR's Division of Environmental Protection pesticide program conducted a "misuse inspection" on Monday and found that Terminix used a chemical called "Meth-O-Gas Q" in unit J at Sirenusa on March 18 and also used the chemical at the Sirenusa residences in October 2014.

PNR found that the chemical is not approved for use in residential structures and that Terminix did not apply Meth-O-Gas Q in a manner consistent with the label.

“During the inspection, Respondent provided an MSDS for a product with an EPA registration number that was different from the Methyl Bromide product that was observed by the inspectors,” the DPNR order states. An MSDS is a Material Safety Data Sheet, a document that details how a certain chemical should be used.

DPNR issued the first order on Tuesday, demanding that by close of business Thursday, Terminix provide all information about any use of MethO-Gas Q or any other product containing methyl bromide in the last 12 months.

The department also ordered Terminix to quarantine any product containing methyl bromide.

On Wednesday, an inspection was made at Terminix on St. Croix, located in Peter’s Rest, and investigators found Methyl Bromide Quarantine Fumigant.

They also found that the chemical was used on the following dates:

- On July 15, 2014, to fumigate a 20-foot container of dry lumber.
- On Nov. 26, 2014, at No. 143 Shoys, described as a residential area.
- On Dec. 19, 2014, on kitchen cabinets at the Armory Building on St. Croix.

DPNR found that not only was the chemical not used as prescribed by the label, it was not stored in the correct manner either.

On Thursday, DPNR issued a second “stop use” order to Terminix to immediately stop using and quarantine any product containing methyl bromide and to report any use of the chemical within the last 12 months.

Terminix now has 10 days to show DPNR why the company should not have to get rid of any and all methyl bromide it has in its possession. Also on Thursday, the EPA issued a pesticide use warning for methyl bromide, urging anyone using the chemical follow the label instructions.

For more information visit www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol.

DPNR: Terminix Used Methyl Bromide Pesticide on St. Croix

VI SOURCE

BY LYNDA LOHR

MARCH 27, 2015

Terminix, the company named in the apparent chemical poisoning of a vacationing Delaware family at Sirenusa condominiums on St. John, also used a pesticide containing methyl bromide on three occasions on St. Croix, a Stop Use order issued Thursday by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources indicates.

A Stop Use order issued Tuesday indicates that Terminix used the pesticide in October 2014 as well as on March 18 at Sirenusa.

Two days after the March 18 fumigation at Sirenusa in an attempt to get rid of powder post beetles, members of a family vacationing at the condominium complex suffered seizures and were flown to stateside hospitals.

Efforts to learn more about their current conditions have been unsuccessful.

DPNR spokesman Jamal Nielsen said that so far the investigation into the pesticide's use hasn't turned up anyone who got sick on St. Croix.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said in one of its releases that health effects of acute exposure to methyl bromide are serious and include central nervous system and respiratory system damage.

According Thursday's Stop Use order, Terminix fumigated a 20-foot container containing dry lumber at an unspecified location on St. Croix on July 15, 2014. On Nov. 26, 2014, the company fumigated a residence located at 143 Shoys, and on Dec. 19, 2014, kitchen cabinets at the Armory Building, also on St. Croix.

The Stop Use order indicates that, in addition to using a pesticide not approved for use in a residential structure, the company did not apply the pesticide in accordance with instructions on the label.

Among its many caveats, the 15-page label providing instructions for use of methyl bromide calls for sealing the building. The label was provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and deals with getting rid of agricultural pests, which is an allowed use.

Nielsen said the department is now inspecting all companies across the territory that offer pest eradication services to make sure they're not using banned pesticides.

Both Stop Use orders indicate that DPNR could impose a penalty of up to \$5,000 for the first violation.

The Stop Use order issued Tuesday in relationship to the Sirenusa situation identifies the pesticide as Meth-O-Gas. It said that Terminix used a pesticide not approved for use in residences, used it in a manner that was inconsistent with directions on the label, did not store it according the label's directions, and provided a registration number that was different than the pesticide containing methyl bromide the inspectors observed.

The Stop Use order gave Terminix until the end of the day to provide documentation concerning the purchase during the last year of any methyl bromide-containing pesticides anywhere in the Virgin Islands. Nielsen said previously that Terminix bought the pesticide in Puerto Rico.

According to the Stop Use order, Terminix must quarantine the pesticides with methyl bromide in secure locations.

Pesticides containing methyl bromide were phased out for residential use about 10 years ago because they impacted the earth's ozone layer. However, if it or an approved replacement chemical such as Vikane is used, the area must be tented. Nielsen said previously that tents were not in place in the March 20 Sirenusa incident.

EPA spokesman Elias Rodriquez said Thursday that air monitoring and environmental sampling continues at Sirenusa.

"The purpose of the sampling is to inform our decision," Rodriquez said, adding that he expects the first results to be back next week.

Rodriquez said the EPA first learned that a pesticide containing methyl bromide was used in the Sirenusa situation from local authorities.

"Terminix told us," Nielsen added.

Rodriquez said he could neither confirm nor deny that EPA's criminal investigation unit was involved in the investigation.

On Thursday, EPA issued a "warning advisory" about the use of pesticides and said pesticides must be used in accordance with label directions.

To view the EPA's Pesticides Use Warning, visit www.epa.gov/region2/epa-pesticidewarning.pdf. That warning leads to a list of restricted use items that include several Meth-O-Gas products including one with the same registration number as the one listed in the Stop Use order concerning Sirenusa.

For more information about pesticides, their health effects and how they should be used and disposed of, call the National Pesticide Information Center at 800-858-7378 or visit www2.epa.gov/safepestcontrol.

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